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## Uloga društvenih medija u političkoj komunikaciji: Korištenje Twittera tijekom općih izbora u Turskoj 2011.

### Sažetak

Ova studija je dio opsežnog istraživanja pod potporom TUBITAK SOBAG-a (Znanstveno i tehnološko istraživačko vijeće Turske – donatorska grupa za istraživanje u području društvenih i humanističkih znanosti) koja istražuje kvantitativnim i kvalitativnim metodama postupke političkih stranka i lidera političkih stranaka prilikom korištenja društvenih medija kao kanala / prostora za političku komunikaciju. Cilj studije je pokazati, u okviru razvoja građanske kulture, diskursivne postupke i politički jezik političkih stranaka koji nastaju kao rezultat učinkovitog korištenja društvenih medija u političkim komunikacijskim kampanjama.

**Ključne riječi:** politička komunikacija, društveni mediji, Twitter, analiza sučelja, opći izbori u Turskoj 2011.

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## The role of social media in political communication: Use of Twitter in the 2011 General Elections in Turkey

### Summary

This study is a part of a comprehensive research supported by TÜBİTAK SOBAG (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Grant Group), which investigates with quantitative and qualitative methods the practices involved in the usage of the social media by political parties and political party leaders as a channel/area for political communication. The aim for this study is to demonstrate, within the framework of the developing citizenship culture, the discourse practices and the political language of the political parties that emerges as a result of the effective use of social media environments in political communication campaigns.

**Key words:** political communication, social media, Twitter, interface analysis, 2011 General Elections in Turkey

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## Introduction

*This study is a part of a comprehensive research supported by TÜBİTAK SOBAG (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Grant Group)<sup>1</sup>.*

The social media, which plays an important role in the development of citizenship culture due to the manifestation of speech-act activism in the digital public space, has become in our day an increasingly visible area in the evaluation and assessment of political developments. It is one of the main means used by political parties and leaders for expressing, reinforcing and spreading political preferences. Due to its multi-layered structure, the usage of social media for political communication leads to results and experiences that differ from one another. To be able to define the “successful” and “effective” use of the social media as a means for political communication, it is necessary to understand the specific conditions that fashion the experiences and results pertaining to the use of the social media, and to investigate how the features of these new media environments are utilized by both the followers and the account holders on the social media.

In the 2009 local elections, it was observed that the youth branches of the political parties in particular extensively used social sharing networks such as Twitter and Facebook to describe party policies and to announce activities, and that certain mayor candidates preferred to reach and address their voters through their Tweets and Facebook walls. In the 2011 general elections, we can say that political parties, their leaders and independent candidates used more extensively the social media environments provided by the web 2.0. One aspect which we considered as a given prior to this study was the importance of Twitter and Facebook in political communication campaigns. The fact that Turkey ranks fourth country in the world in terms of Facebook use has lead many political parties to open and set up hundreds of pages and groups on this interface. Twitter has also become widespread in Turkey as of 2009-2010, and many young members of the parliament with high digital literacy levels in particular have gained thousands of followers on their Twitter accounts. It was observed that

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<sup>1</sup> The research project with TÜBİTAK SOBAG code 111k263 is entitled as “The Evaluation of Social Media Environments in terms of Political Communication Applications: The Use of the Facebook and Twitter by Political Parties and Leaders during the 2011 General Elections in Turkey”.

political party leaders began to actively use Twitter especially during election periods.

This research involves sample units from four political parties which joined the 2011 General Elections in Turkey: Justice and Development Party (AKP), Republican People's Party (CHP), National Movement Party (MHP) and Labor, Democracy and Freedom Block (EDÖB).

**AKP**<sup>2</sup> was founded in 2001. Leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as the founding president by the founders' committee. Defining its ideology within the frame of conservative democracy, AKP came to power alone in all the general elections (2002, 2007, 2011) and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took charge of the premiership.

**CHP**<sup>3</sup> was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. CHP ideology is formed with regard to the principles of Kemalism and social democracy. CHP, also known as the party to establish the republic, was in power alone for 23 years until 1946 when the first general elections were held in Turkey. Today CHP is in parliament as the main opposition party. Its current chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is on duty as the 7th chairman of the party since 2010.

The period beginning with the Nation Party (Millet Partisi - MP) and continuing with the Republican Villagers National Party (Cumhuriyet Köylü Millet Partisi - CKMP) represents the prehistory of **MHP**.<sup>4</sup> The party joined the 1969 general elections with its leader Alparslan Türkeş under the name of "Nationalist Movement Party." Devlet Bahçeli has been elected as the second leader after the demise of Türkeş and he is currently in duty. Positioning itself within the framework of Turkish nationalism and Islam, MHP has had a significant role in the politics of Turkey since its foundation.

The new Kurdish political movement, which began with the People's Labor Party (HEP) in 1990, is now represented by the BDP.<sup>5</sup> BDP was founded in 2008 in preparation for the possibility of closure of the Democratic Society Party (DTP) and actually took over its place when it has been shut down by the Constitutional Court in 2009. Unlike in other parties, co-presidential system is applied in BDP instead of general

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<sup>2</sup> Official website: <http://www.akparti.org.tr/english> [Accessed 25 November 2012].

<sup>3</sup> Official website: <http://www.chp.org.tr/en> [Accessed 25 November 2012].

<sup>4</sup> Official website: <http://www.mhp.org.tr> [Accessed 25 November 2012].

<sup>5</sup> Official website: <http://bdp.org.tr> [Accessed 25 November 2012].

presidency. The co-presidents of the party are Gültan Kışanak and Selahattin Demirtaş. BDP did not join the 2011 General Elections but supported the independent candidates that were reunited under the roof of the **EDÖB**.

This study describes how the leaders and members of these parties defined democracy, explained the meaning of democratic participation, produced and disseminated their own ideological positions and values and interacted with citizens by using their official accounts on Twitter during the elections. Within this perspective we seek answers to the following questions: How and to what extent have political party leaders, co-chairmen and independent candidates used Twitter during the 2011 General Elections? What were the differences and similarities in the practices involved in the usage of Twitter? How does the interaction and participation in the social media, as well as features such as the production of user-generated content, affect the political communication process and the discursive practices of the political party leaders?

## **Describing Social Media Environments: The Twitter Interface**

As a social media application, Twitter functions as microblog. Twitter is a program that was first put into service in 2006, and which allows for messages of up to 140 characters. These writings are referred to as “Tweets.” However, as is the case with Facebook, Twitter requires its users to create a profile (Tumajsan et al. 2010). According to Presley Ifukor, microblogging combines the best features of the e-mail, sms, blogs and instant messaging (2010: 400).

From the very beginning, Twitter has positioned itself as an autonomous entity that is not limited or associated with a single medium, country or service. Jose van Dijck lists the reasons for using Twitter as follows:

1. The conversation and dialogue feature (similar to short messaging on the telephone, but not dependant on a single person or webpage)
2. The fact that it enables solidarity and change (with certain users)

3. The fact that it enables self-expression and self-communication (similar to blogging)
4. Status update and control
5. Sharing of information and news
6. Marketing and advertisement (depending on location, area of interest and connections).

Thus, thanks to its features described above, Twitter can easily compete with other means of communication (2011).

If we evaluate the general features of the Twitter interface, which is gradually becoming part of everyday life for its users, we can see that a Tweet refers to the 140 character messages (microblog messages) sent by the users. The written/sent Tweets are forwarded to the person's followers. For Tweets sent to others, or which these other persons are requested to read, the Twitter user employs a delivery mode known as **"mention."** These deliveries are defined in the system through the use of the **"@[Twitter User Name]"** element within the Tweet. Another feature of Twitter is that the latest messages are listed on top. **"Hashtag"** defines Tweets that are sent regarding a certain subject. On the Tweet that is forwarded, a label in the form of **"#[user/hashtag to be used]"** <sup>6</sup> is added. Tweets with this label can be read by all other users seeking Tweets associated with this label. The **"trending topic"**s listed on the Twitter main page is determined by the hashtags. Hashtags are applications that enable Twitter to be used for drawing attention to social topics, and to guide public opinion towards a certain subject.

In the first stage of this study, Twitter accounts of all political parties that participated in the 2011 General Elections and which were entitled to form groups within the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) according to the General Elections results on 12 June 2011, were printed and recorded between 1 April 2011 – 30 June 2011 as study samples in pdf format by using the web interface. These accounts as well as the official accounts of party leaders and Central Executive Committee (MYK) members were accessed retrospectively.

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<sup>6</sup> This feature can also be called the repeatable label. The usage of this feature groups Tweets with other Tweets of the same type. In the study of Bruns and Burgess, in which they investigated to use of the **"#ausvotes"** hashtag during the 2010 Australian Federal Elections, it was determined that the individuals using this feature wanted their Tweet on the subject to be seen by others (2011:37-38). According to Bruns and Burgess, hashtag is a public conversation. This study also closely scrutinized whether the political parties and candidates Tweeted by using hashtag.

Political party leaders, party vice chairmen, MYK members, all of the independent candidates and the journalist parliamentary candidates were also included to the sampling performed on Twitter. Among these individuals, accounts with 250+ Tweets or 2500+ followers were selected for second stage content analysis.

## Development of the Coding Scales and Coding Units

Nuri Bilgin defines the process of categorization as follows: “Categorization necessitates the coding, in other words the interpretation of the messages. The categories of analysis can be based on various aspects of the message in which we are interested.” For example, aspects pertaining to the content of the message, such as the message’s subject, its direction (for or against something), the values it conveys, its purposes and intentions, the means used for achieving its goals, the features or elements used in describing individuals, the source of the message, the individuals or masses targeted by the message, the time and place in which the events transpire and the subjects of conflict can be used as the basis for categorization. Similarly, categorization may also be based on aspects concerning the phraseology of the message, such as the type or form of the message, the characteristics of the grammar used in the message or communication, the syntax, and the propaganda elements or rhetorical methods being employed (2006: 19).

The codes used in this study were developed by the entire project team during the meetings held between the dates of November 2011 – January 2012. Selected samples for political parties, political leaders and other candidates from Twitter were discussed and relevant units were defined in these meetings. The coding scale<sup>7</sup> and the coding units<sup>8</sup> used on the materials were obtained from Twitter and defined one by one according to the principle of developing coding rules. To assess whether

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<sup>7</sup> The coding scale “... is very similar to a questionnaire form. The coding scale includes a list of variables that serve to code each publication or writing, or smaller study units such as a paragraph or sentence, or whatever they may be.” (Hansen 2003: 85).

<sup>8</sup> “The recording unit is the smallest section of a text that is investigated to reveal a certain content. The context unit is the largest section of the text that needs to be considered for the proper categorization of the recording unit. The recording unit and context unit may be the same; however, it is not obligatory for them to be so.” (Herkner, 2003: 149).

the units on the coding scale were functional, a pilot application was performed on the database in February 2012. In March 2012, the database was subject to scanning, and the numerical data that corresponded to the coding units were transferred to the database as a Microsoft Excel file.

In the coding scale concerning the usage of Twitter by parties, leaders and candidates during the 2011 General Elections, there are initially quantitative and descriptive question units evaluating the features of the mentioned interface. For example, question units were formed for Twitter based on the person's name, Twitter address, information, customized background features, the visual quality of the profile, the number of Tweets, the number of persons s/he followed, the number of followers s/he has, the listed numbers, the number of Tweets on the day of elections, and the 25 most frequently used words in his/her Tweets.

## **Results<sup>9</sup>**

Within the context of the sampling period (1 April 2011 – 30 June 2011), 9 Twitter accounts among Justice and Development Party (AKP) users, 7 accounts among Republican People's Party (CHP) users, 6 accounts among National Movement Party (MHP) users, 7 accounts among Labor, Democracy and Freedom Block (EDÖB) users and 7 accounts among independent parliamentary candidates were subject to content analysis.<sup>10</sup> Among the different accounts within the sample, the group which made the most extensive use of Twitter was the Independent Candidates, with an average of 496 Tweets per account. The number was 454 for AKP candidates, 310 for MHP candidates, 107 for CHP candidates and 308 for EDÖB candidates.

Succeeding the independent candidates, the most extensive use of Twitter was made by AKP users. In terms of the extent to which the accounts were used, a significant difference is observed between the independent candidates and AKP users on one hand and the other political parties in the other hand. The number of Tweets sent from the

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<sup>9</sup> In order to conform to the journal style and to meet space limitation it was not possible to share all the findings from the research. A more comprehensive compilation of findings will be available in the TÜBİTAK publication when the research is completed.

<sup>10</sup> The account owners included into the content analysis are referred to as "users."



party leaders' accounts during the sampling period is as follows; Selahattin Demirtaş 237, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan 90, Devlet Bahçeli 88, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu 42 and Gültan Kışanak 14.<sup>11</sup>

When the evaluated accounts in terms of the number of Tweets sent daily, the groups which sent more than 100 Tweets in a single day were MHP candidates, AKP candidates and independent candidates. For EDÖB and CHP, on the other hand, the numbers of Tweets sent have not exceeded 100 on any day. At this point, it should be mentioned again that the total number of Tweets sent from the CHP accounts within the sample was 752.

The political party which made the most extensive use of Twitter on 12 June 2011, the day of the General Election, was AKP with 130 Tweets. This result is largely due to the fact that AKP was the party that won the election. AKP was followed by the independent candidates with 119 Tweets on the Election Day.

The details concerning the usage of the Twitter interface by the evaluated users were initially investigated at the level of information shared regarding the accounts' owners. These information included specific location or city, personal profile, occupation, tasks and responsibilities within the party, web connections belonging to him/her other than the Twitter accounts, and whether the accounts had content in languages other than Turkish.

It was observed that the large majority of users described on Twitter the province and city to which they were affiliated. Among the EDOB candidates and independent candidates, the number of those who shared information regarding their cities was nearly equal to the number of those who did not provide such information. When the accounts of the political party leaders were evaluated, it was observed that the AKP, CHP and MHP leaders all shared information regarding their cities on their Twitter accounts. The BDP Co-Chairmen Selahattin Demirtaş and Gültan Kışanak, on the other hand, have not shared city-based information on their accounts.

Regardless of the party they were affiliated to, it was observed that most Twitter users did not share their personal profile regarding their titles, such as "doctor," "lawyer" and "professor" or any kind of

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<sup>11</sup> When reviewing the data on the leaders in the following sections of the study, it should be taken into account that the number of Tweets sent by Gültan Kışanak during the time within the sampling period was very low.

information on their civil status. It was seen that most of them did not share their occupational information either. It was noted that the majority of those who shared occupational information on their Twitter accounts were individuals who had professions associated with the media. Another point being noteworthy is the fact that none of the political party leaders shared any personal profile on their accounts.

The number of candidates who provided descriptive information on their Twitter accounts in languages other than Turkish was only two. The AKP user who provided content in a language other than Turkish was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, while the MHP user who provided content in a language other than Turkish was Ömer Kanburoğlu. The language other than Turkish used by both of these users was English. On the other hand, it was noted that BDP candidates, who participated in the elections as EDÖB candidates, did not use Kurdish for the descriptive information in their accounts.

Almost all AKP users (8) provided, in the descriptive section of their Twitter accounts, information on his/her assignment within the party. Four members of CHP, the half of all MHP users (3) and only one EDÖB member shared this kind of information on their accounts. No information on affiliations was available in the independents' accounts. The candidates and the assignments/tasks assumed by the candidates are listed as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Given assignments of the candidates in Twitter accounts<sup>12</sup>

Party	User	Assignment within the Party
AKP	Abdülkadir Aksu	Ak Party Vice Chairman
AKP	Ekrem Erdem	Justice and Development Party Vice Chairmen
AKP	Hüseyin Çelik	I am the Ak Party Vice Chairman and Party Spokesperson
AKP	Mahir Ünal	MKYK Member
AKP	Mustafa Elitaş	Akparty Group Deputy Chairman
AKP	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	Justice and Development Party Leader
AKP	Salih Kapusuz	Ak Party Vice Chairman, Chairman of Public Relations

<sup>12</sup> Expressions were directly copied from the user accounts and translated into English.

AKP	Zekif Kazdal	Ak Party Vice Chairman
CHP	Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	Republican People's Party Leader
CHP	Sezgin Tanrikulu	Republican People's Party, Vice Chairman on Human Rights
CHP	Sencer Ayata	Vice Chairman
CHP	Ayten Kayalıoğlu	Republican People's Party Vice Chairman Responsible for Public Relations
MHP	Devlet Bahçeli	National Movement Party Leader
MHP	Ruhsar Demirel	MHP Vice Chairman
MHP	Tunca Toskay	MHP Vice Chairman
BDP	Selahattin Demirtaş	Peace and Democracy Party Co-Chairman

The users commonly shared URLs of their sites, blogs, pages and assets other than Twitter. Depending on the case, these URLs could either belong to another application such as the user's Facebook account or user's own personal web site. It was observed that many of the users shared URLs of other pages and platforms on the Internet. Some users even included more than one link to in their Twitter profiles. This way, the user is able to express that the Twitter account genuinely belongs to him/her, and indicates that the other applications and pages for which the URLs are provided are also official channels moderated by him/her. When the web connections shared by the party leaders were evaluated, it was observed that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Devlet Bahçeli, Selahattin Demirtaş and Gültan Kışanak provided links to the websites of their political parties. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has provided a link to his personal website ([www.rte.gen.tr](http://www.rte.gen.tr)) and another one to his Facebook page.<sup>13</sup>

The background design on the Twitter page can be changed from default and customized by the account's owner. It is possible to say that the number of users who customized their account's background was nearly the same as the number of users who did not do so. When the accounts of the party leaders were evaluated, it was observed that all of them have customized the backgrounds on their Twitter accounts. Especially during the election campaign, the usage of backgrounds that are visually catchy and memorable can provide various advantages within the context of the campaign activities. On the other hand, it was observed that

<sup>13</sup> <http://Facebook.com/RecepTayyipErdoğan>

the large majority of users who customized the background of their Twitter accounts did not use their party's logo and/or emblem. It was noted that BDP Co-Chairmen Selahattin Demirtaş and Gültan Kışanak as well as the AKP Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did not use their party's logo on their customized Twitter background, while the CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and the MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli have preferred to use their party's logo on their accounts. This situation can be considered ordinary for candidates who participated to the elections as EDÖB candidates. However, it seems that the users who customized their account's background without adding the party logo and/or emblem at the background of their Twitter accounts are overlooking an important promotion/propaganda tool at their disposal.

The low frequency of party logo or emblem usage on Twitter account pages can also be observed for the profile pictures, which is another visual aspect of these accounts. Even though all of the users had changed Twitter's default visual image, the large majority of these users had not added the logo or emblem of their political party. On the other hand, it was noted that instead of using their own photographs, the large majority of the users have employed pictures in which they are seen in front of a certain backdrop. In this context, the backdrop could be a photograph of the candidate taken during a meeting or a speech, providing an idea about the setting and environment in which the candidate is found. With the exception of CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, all of the party leaders have preferred to use such backdrops in their profile's pictures. The party leaders who chose to include their party logo in their profile's picture were CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli and BDP Co-Chairman Selahattin Demirtaş.

When the number of individuals who portrayed and represented their personal identities in their profile's pictures was evaluated, it was noted that the large majority of those evaluated within the context of the study included pictures of themselves in which they are on their own. There were no profile pictures among MHP users where the candidates portrayed themselves together with other individuals (for example, at a political rally, together with supporters, etc.), while AKP, CHP, and the independent candidates each had only one account with such pictures. For EDÖB candidates, it was observed that the number of accounts with pictures where the candidates are seen together with others was very close to their total number of accounts. Also, this number for the EDÖB candidates was higher compared to the other parties.

When the theme of Tweets are evaluated, topics pertaining to their “respective parties” were preferred by nearly all party members. 6.51% (1209) of the Tweets from AKP candidates, 38.56% (290) of the Tweets from CHP candidates, 26.49% (492) of the Tweets from MHP candidates, 33.77% (729) of the Tweets from EDÖB and 51.92% (1802) of the Tweets from independent candidates were Tweets related to the users’ own parties. The number of Tweets sent concerning events worldwide was very low in all of the groups. The proportion of Tweets commenting on events worldwide was 0.32% (13) for AKP, 3.06% (23) for CHP, 2.48% (46) for MHP, 0.32% (7) for EDÖB, and 0.61% (21) for the independent candidates. The number of comments concerning events in Turkey was significantly high among the Tweets from the MHP. 34.41% (639) of MHP’s Tweets were concerning events in Turkey. The proportion of Tweets commenting on other parties and political rivals was 5.49% (224) for AKP, 16.49% (124) for CHP, 11.79% (219) for MHP, 28.07% (606) for EDÖB, and 8.38% (291) for the independent candidates. When cultural activities were evaluated on the Twitter accounts, the political party that made the most extensive use of this theme was AKP. 34.41% (927) of AKP’s Tweets were concerning cultural activities. For other parties, the proportion of Tweets on cultural activities was 6.25% (47) for CHP, 10.45% (194) for MHP, 1.07% (23) for EDÖB, and 1.41% (49) for the independent candidates. During the campaign period, the usage of Twitter for announcement purposes was considerably low for all of the parties and groups. The proportion of Tweets for announcement purposes was 2.62% (107) for AKP, 5.32% (40) for CHP, 5.76% (107) for MHP, 2.55% (55) for EDÖB, and 11.18% (388) for the independent candidates.

In all groups, the majority of Tweets were written by the account holders. It was uncommon for Tweets from other candidates within the same party or from the electorate to be shared again, in other words for the Tweets to be recirculated. The proportion of “retweets” was respectively 3.97% (162), 7.05% (53), 5.53% (99), 5.93% (128) and 10.37% (360) for the AKP, the CHP, the MHP, the EDÖB and the independent candidates. When the retweets of the party leaders were reviewed, it was observed that Gültan Kışanak and Devlet Bahçeli have never sent any retweets, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan only sent 1, and that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Selahattin Demirtaş both used retweets only on 2 occasions.

Overlooking Twitter as a new media environment, most users have utilized Twitter without sharing any links and only to convey their own statements in text. 67.50% (2756) of the Tweets from AKP users, 70.08%

(527) of the Tweets from CHP users, 67.42% (1252) of the Tweets from MHP users, 88.05% (1901) of the Tweets from EDÖB users and 71.07% (2467) of the Tweets from independent candidates did not contain any links. On the other hand, the proportion of Tweets sharing links that directs to any other content belonging to the party was the highest among AKP users, with 31.13% (1271) of Tweets providing such links. The same rate was respectively 11.57% (87), 11.25% (209), 8.83% (181) and 14.41% (500) for the CHP, the MHP, the EDÖB and the independent candidates.

URLs<sup>14</sup> in Twitter can be shared in standard or abridged form. The abridged URL allows any content to be accessed through a shorter web address. On Twitter, the use of short URLs is important due to the limitation of 140 characters for each Tweet. While the use of standard address links was more common in the accounts of CHP, MHP and independent candidates, short links were used at nearly similar rates. Within AKP, the large majority of the links used in the Tweets were standard address URLs. Only 2.49% (33) of the links used by the AKP representatives were short links. In EDÖB accounts, short links were used more frequently than the standard links. In this respect, the results and observations for EDÖB were different from the other groups. During the political campaign period, the users who only utilized short links (100% of the time) were Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (in 24 Tweets), Sezgin Tanrıkulu (in 5 Tweets), Selahattin Demirtaş (1 Tweet) and Gültan Kışanak (1 Tweet).

The highest rate of hashtag use was observed in the CHP accounts, with 2.79% (21) of the Tweets including hashtags. For the other groups, hashtag use was observed in 34 Tweets for AKP, 16 Tweets for MHP, 3 Tweets for EDÖB, and 50 Tweets for the independent candidates. It was determined that the party leaders other than Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu have not used any Hashtags.

Being able to forward Tweets to the attention of other candidates and/or the voters is of great importance for interacting with them. The use of “mention” means that the Tweet written by the person is addressed to another Twitter user. In case the relevant user’s username is included into the Tweet along with the “@” symbol, the message will be forwarded to the person even if he/she is not a follower. Indeed, to be able to use mention, the recipient of the forwarded message must also be a Twitter user, and the person writing the Tweet must know his/her username. Normal message deliveries are messages in which the account owner refers

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<sup>14</sup> URL (Uniform Resource Locator). Commonly referred to as the web address.

to someone in his/her Tweet, but can decide whether this person will or will not receive the message. It is observed that the majority of the Tweets sent by AKP, EDÖB and independent candidates are messages that include mention. 36.98% (1510) of AKP's Tweets, 25.66% (554) of EDÖB's Tweets, and 25.76% (894) of the independent candidates' Tweets included mention. For CHP and MHP, the proportion of messages with mention was lower than that of ordinary posts. The relevant rates were 17.69% (133) for CHP, 11.04% (205) for MHP.

When the party leaders' Tweets are evaluated in terms of forwarded messages, it is observed that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu did not forward messages to any person. Selahattin Demirtaş, on the other hand, has used mention in 174 of his Tweets, directly addressing only some of the other Twitter users. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has used mention feature in 3 of his Tweets. Based on these observations, it is possible to say that Selahattin Demirtaş is the leader who interacted the most with other users on Twitter.

The language employed by the users was Turkish in almost all of their Tweets. The proportion of Turkish Tweets was 98.73% (4031) for AKP, 95.21% (716) for CHP, 92.25% (1713) for MHP, 95.41% (2060) for EDÖB, and 97.18% (3373) for the independent candidates. The proportion of Tweets sent in English was very low for all users. EDÖB candidates were the only users who used Kurdish in their Tweets. None of the candidates from the AKP, CHP, MHP and the non-EDÖB independent candidates have preferred Kurdish as the language for their Tweets. The number of Kurdish Tweets by EDÖB candidates was 50 (2.32%).

In the evaluation performed regarding the tone of the Tweets, all of the tones that suitably described the Tweet were marked during the coding. With regards to tone, Tweets that included "praise" were observed at a rate of 85.28% (3482) in AKP Tweets, 64.23% (483) in CHP Tweets, 57.30% in MHP Tweets (1064), and 64.13% (2226) in the Tweets of the independent candidates. For these groups, praise was the tone that was the most frequently used in their Tweets. In EDÖB Tweets, on the other hand, the most frequently used tone was "taunting" with a rate of 47.24% (1020), while praise was the second most frequently used tone with a rate of 39.65% (856). Taunting was also the second most commonly used tone for AKP, CHP and MHP. Among these three parties, taunting as a tone was observed most commonly in MHP with a rate of 40.66% (755).

Among the tones defined in the coding system, another tone that was used at a frequency greater than 5% was “provocation.” The rate of provocative Tweets was the highest among independent candidates, with a rate of 21.23% (737). Among CHP users, 8.24% (62) of the Tweets were provocative in tone. For the independent candidates, the second most frequently used tone was provocation, while the third most frequently used tone was taunting with a rate of 21% (729).

All the parties have adopted a “dominating” stance in their Tweets. Use of language that reflects a dominating attitude was observed in 2812 of AKP’s Tweets, 663 of CHP’s Tweets, 1535 of MHP’s Tweets, 1850 of EDÖB’s Tweets and in 3082 of independent candidates’ Tweets. It was seen that a dominating language was used in over 80% of the Tweets from the CHP, MHP, EDÖB and independent candidates. On the other hand, the rate of use of a language that reflected a dominating attitude was 68.87% for AKP, although numerically the amount was highest in comparison to the other groups. The use of language between equals was the most frequently observed for AKP, with a rate of 26.65% (1088). In the case of leaders’ practices, although the use of language between equals was most frequently employed by Selahattin Demirtaş, all leaders have adopted a generally dominating stance in their Tweets.

The most commonly used conjugation in all Tweets was the third-person singular. The number of Tweets with third-person singular verb conjugation was 1613 for AKP, 389 for CHP, 1072 for MHP, 1444 for EDÖB and 1801 for the independent candidates. The first-person plural was the second most frequent conjugation for the CHP (151) and MHP (260), and the third most frequent conjugation for AKP (800), EDÖB (223) and the independent candidates (237). For the AKP, EDÖB and the independent candidates, the most commonly used verb conjugation was first-person singular. It must also be underlined that in all groups, the type of language used in the majority of Tweets was spoken language.

When the frequencies of the subjects in the party leaders’ Tweets were evaluated, it was observed that 64.44% (58) of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Tweets were about the “activities conducted on the traditional media in association with his political identity.” Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has mentioned his own party in 38.10% (16) of his Tweets as subject. In Devlet Bahçeli’s and Selahattin Demirtaş’s Tweets, the most frequently mentioned subject was their personal agenda. Tweets with personal agenda as their main subject constituted 55.68% (49) of Bahçeli’s Tweets and



54.85% (130) of Demirtaş' Tweets. As for Gültan Kışanak, 71.43% (10) of her Tweets had references to the Kurdish Issue.

## Assessment

When analyzing the quantitative data, it was derived that AKP is the political party with the most visibility on the social media environments. Thus, in parallel to the composition of the parliament, the party with the highest representation also has the largest presence/appearance in Twitter. With regards to the leaders, it is possible to say that offline rhetoric reflected itself onto the online activities.

Another important point comes up when the usage of the social media as a platform of political communication is analyzed. It was determined that the political parties with relatively more successful practices and strategies were at the same time the ones which invested in web 1.0 technologies and effectively used this channel during the discovery period of the web as a means of political communication.

In order to support the quantitative data analysis and to complete the study, discourse analysis will be performed by focusing on the ideological structure of political parties, which forms the basis of their discursive practices. Thus, the usage of metaphors, proverbs and other related units that are observed in the quantitative data will be subject to an analysis, and it will be possible to make inferences concerning the context in which common concepts (e.g. democracy, rights, etc.) are utilized. Last, but not least by organizing in-depth interviews with the individuals, whose accounts were investigated, the extent of the sampled users' presence in social media environment as well as possible strategies to augment this presence will be discussed.

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